

## ***Amor Monstrum; or The Nihilist Practice of Body Positivity***

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"I know of no other way of dealing with tasks than *play*: this is, as a sign of greatness, an essential prerequisite[...]Today I still have the same affability toward everybody, I am even full of respect for the lowliest: in all this there is not a grain of haughtiness, of secret contempt. He whom I despise divines that he is despised by me: through my mere existence I enrage all those who have bad blood in their veins...My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not in the future, not in the past, not for all eternity. Not only to endure what is necessary, still less to conceal it — all idealism is falseness in the face of necessity — , but to *love* it..."

-- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*

"The transsexual body is an unnatural body...[i]t is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.[...]The affront you humans take at being called a "creature" results from the threat the term poses to your status as "lords of creation," beings elevated above mere material existence. As in the case of being called "it," being called a "creature" suggests the lack or loss of a superior personhood. I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities. "Monster" is derived from the Latin noun *monstrum*, "divine portent," itself formed on the root of the verb *monere*, "to warn." It came to refer to living things of anomalous shape or structure, or to fabulous creatures like the sphinx who were composed of strikingly incongruous parts, because the ancients considered the appearance of such beings to be a sign of some impending supernatural event. Monsters, like angels, functioned as messengers and heralds of the extraordinary. They served to announce impending revelation, saying, in effect, "Pay attention; something of profound importance is happening.""

-- Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage"

The life of a trans woman, a life such as my own, is characterized by restraint. One restrains themselves from feeling the pain afflicted upon them, from retaliating toward the violence levied against them, from blaming those who make simple but deep-cutting mistakes. The trans woman

quickly learns that there are things far beyond her own power, but there are also things that *should* be within her power, which she is constantly denied. It's simple enough to say that the fact of trans embodiment is much more of a painful state of war than it is for her critics, whose spite appears to emerge from, above all things, fear. When the soldier sets off for war, the grief and fear of the home-bound is both self-indulgent and self-denying. Why affix your own well-being to that of the soldier when their well-being of the soldier is out of your hands? Juxtaposed to this sentiment, the fear that is transmisogyny is fundamentally based on a sense of defense. The presence of trans women is seen as a matter of public security and they are forbidden from nearly everywhere from public restrooms to feminist spaces. Many so-called feminists claim that trans women are "colonizing womanhood"; on the contrary, womanhood is a colonial power itself in a number of senses. Of course, the modern gender system is built on colonialism and the subjugation of Earth and its people to Eurocentric relations of domination, and womanhood has been a category of non-being and Otherness that has historically been denied to colonized peoples. Like the colonizing One, these cis feminists proclaim their womanhood as *the* defining womanhood, stabilizing and naturalizing the oppression they claim to oppose, and deny other women from entrance into this womanhood, and thus their political movement, on the basis of 'impurity.' This reactionary feminism, passed off and often referred to as "radical feminism," all too often falls into explicit eugenic rhetoric. Books like Janice Raymond's "The Transsexual Empire" have the same panicked sense of self-determination found in Lothrop Stoddard's "The Rising Tide of Color Against White-World Supremacy." Instead of violently opposing these reactionaries on their own terms, that of the One and the Other, substantiating their claims and possibly bringing more harm upon themselves, the ideal path for the trans woman is flight, escape, refusing to play the game, *restraint*.

In "Protofeminism and antifeminism", Christine Delphy discusses the revaluation of women's bodies and the practice and motivation of this revaluation being a problematic, but important, situation to be handled among those seeking the liberation of women. The question of 'self-acceptance' or 'body positivity', in contemporary language, should be posed with a *hammer*, examined for the sound of emptiness.<sup>4</sup> As seen with reactionary radical feminism, "[a] new

version of the dominant ideology can be camouflaged under the guise of 'liberation.'" We should ask as Delphy does, "what is the 'self' one accepts?" When I say "I love my trans body," what do I mean? And what should I mean? The body is, of course, not without its own constraints of meanings and narratives. The morality of custom, our values of modern gender, coming from the life-negating spirit of Christianity, rests on the vilification and punishment of the body. By general principle, to take pleasure in the body is vain, selfish, sinful, and disgusting. The body is the foundation of making Other. (It's no wonder that the feminine is always associated with the body!) The transfeminine body is constructed as both hypersexualized and desexualized. Just as sexual pleasure is repressed and denied expression for all women, it is especially so for trans women. Navigating the pornographic depiction of trans women is enough to see just how one is constructed in the minds of men. The hypersexualized trans woman is the conventionally beautiful sexual object, whose allure, often read as 'mystique', emerges from her ability to pass combined with her ever-present Otherness, i.e. the presence of her penis, her medically constructed sexual features, etc. It is exciting when you bring a girl home and she turns out to have 'a little something extra'. (This mode of thought is clearly a fiction, and in reality, such 'deception' is life-threatening.) In my personal opinion, the culmination of the hypersexual stereotype is the trans woman as the dominating top, perhaps even one who cuckolds a cis man. On the other hand, the desexualized trans woman is extremely submissive and this stereotype largely overlaps into territory of gay (cis male) porn, in the "sissy" phenomenon. The sissy is to be absolutely slave to her male suitor and is only coded as feminine in her capacity to submit. Otherwise, this stereotype is just the classic "man in a dress" trope, being fucked and defiled. Much of the overlap of the desexualization of trans women with gay porn (straight porn too, but not in the same way) is the violent feminization of bottoms, especially noted in the language the hypermasculine top uses describing the bottom, which involves trans/misogynistic slurs as well as the transposal of 'male' sexual organs/functions into 'female' category (see: "cl\*tty", "boip\*ssy" (and its many variants)). Transfeminine embodiment and identity is summarily rooted in the body and its sexual relation to men. (Consider that porn starring trans women is usually a massive category all its own, separate from "straight" and "gay", even as cis lesbian porn is always under "straight.") This, of course, is extremely damaging for the psyche of a young trans

woman, whether she realizes it initially or not. As a result, the sentiment behind "I love my trans body" could mean something utterly dangerous and harmful, one's self-acceptance lending itself to one's position as a sexual object. Simply being called "beautiful" or "pretty" is filled with the nuances of gendered aesthetic values and often levels of vague and confusing sexual discomfort, embarrassment, or excitement. To revalue our trans bodies, to truly love them, we must refuse to concede to these values that harm us. A revision of Monique Wittig's declaration: "...we have to destroy the myth inside and outside. 'Trans woman' is not each one of us, but the political and ideological formation which negates 'trans women.'"

The question of a body positivity that seeks to reevaluate all values and prompt trans women to practice freedom, to enjoy autonomy from the morality of gender, is, in a word, "how does one deal with being ugly?" Prominent trans woman gender theorists Susan Stryker and Sandy Stone both offer a response that could be condensed to: "Go play." Following the postmodern language of textuality, both women pose that the trans subject should write themselves, forgoing the effort to "pass" and, in Stone's words, to become "posttranssexual." The primacy of play as a sign of greatness characterizes the becoming-posttranssexual through which trans women practice freedom of the will. Becoming-posttranssexual is for trans women "to deconstruct the necessity for passing...[to] take responsibility for all of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body." Becoming-posttranssexual is practicing as much freedom within gender as you're willing to take, renouncing any creator other than yourself. Going beyond self-acceptance, one should practice self-(de)construction. Undoing gender begins, but doesn't end, with the individual. As Wittig says, to become legible, "one must assume both a particular *and* a universal point of view." She who takes up the path of freedom does so alone. She has her own territory where the points that determine her path are hers alone; she always walks between two points, favoring the in-between which "has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own." As the determined/determining points are relays for trajectory, she moves along her path only as a factual necessity, which she not only endures but

*loves*. Her path is solely based on her own perspective and so it is a path for which she is entirely responsible. Transgender rage is a necessary counterpart to our un/natural embodiment of monstrosity. Transgender rage is our will to power and we take up for our own survival as a subject; consequently, we must affirm this rage and our own monstrosity, and mobilize it to open up the possibilities for new subjectivities, new identities, new modes of intelligibility.

Transgender rage is each of our guides to creating our own morality. *To my trans sisters*: let us not lament our lives (it is the only one we have), let us not turn our rage against our bodies (it is the only one we have), and let us not turn our rage against a created Other to be our dialectical enemy (vengeance is the pursuit of those things beyond our power). Instead, we should blossom and grow as we desire, we must live for ourselves and look out for ourselves. We must leave the burning old world of gender behind us. If freedom of the will is only found in struggle and hardship, we must take up arms and resist fear. All in all, we must love our monstrosity. Only this *amor monstrum* will keep us from self-destruction. "If this is your path, as it is mine, let me offer whatever solace you may find in this monstrous benediction: May you discover the enlivening power of darkness within yourself. May it nourish your rage. May your rage inform your actions, and your actions transform you as you struggle to transform your world."

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